

Volodymyr Lytvyn, the new presidential chief of staff

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In his day, presidential chief of staff Dmytro Tabachnyk was among the most influential power broker of the executive branch. His influence on the President was so significant; that a number of critics joked that Leonid Kuchma worked as the President in Tabachnyk's administration. In an effort to prevent the domination of the chief of staff, his influence was balanced by the influence of two other top presidential advisers: then Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council Volodymyr Horbulin and head of the group of advisers and assistants to the President Oleksandr Razumkov. At the end of 1995, Oleksandr Razumkov was substituted in his position by Volodymyr Kuznetsov, subsequently succeeded by Volodymyr Lytvyn, who got the positions of the head of the Group of Assistants and Advisers to the President of Ukraine, deputy chairman of the presidential administration and member of the presidential Council for Science, Research and Development Policy.

On November 22, 1999, shortly after his second presidential victory, Leonid Kuchma appointed Volodymyr Lytvyn to the position of the presidential chief of staff. Previous occupant of this position Mykola Biloblotsky, loyal and always prepared to fill a gap at the order of the President, was offered the position of the Ambassador to the most troubled of Ukraine's "strategic partners", the Russian Federation.

Born in 1956 to a peasant family in the Zhytomyr region, Volodymyr Lytvyn is a graduate of the History Department of the Kyiv Taras Shevchenko University (1978). In 1989-1991, he worked as an Assistant Professor of Modern History of the Higher Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine and an Assistant Secretary of the CPU Central Committee. After the August 1991 coup d'etat, he resumed his academic career at the Kyiv University. Shortly after Leonid Kuchma's presidential victory, he joined the Group of Assistants and Advisers to the President of Ukraine led by Oleksandr Razumkov. Dr. Lytvyn focused on humanitarian and home policy aspects and published a number of articles on the need for reforming the country's constitution. He was a member of three working groups in charge of preparing the President's annual Economic Report. Specifically, he was involved in developing proposals for creating a system of social partnership in Ukraine and drafting a concept of the Civic Chamber, a consultative body under the office of the President of Ukraine designed to unite political parties and public organizations, and the Committee for Legislative Initiatives.

Commenting on his appointment as the deputy to then Presidential chief of staff Dmytro Tabachnyk in December 1995, Volodymyr Lytvyn described his new authority in a generous manner: "it's easier to say what he [i.e., himself] will not be dealing with: economics, legal issues and logistics. All other issues are within my sphere of interest." In September 1996, Dr. Lytvyn's opportunity to deal with "issues within his sphere of interest" was enhanced by his appointment to the position of the first adviser to the President of Ukraine, accountable only to his immediate boss, the President. His broad powers included direct control over the intellectual and media support staff, the protocol service, coordination of efforts with other departments of the Administration, planning the President's trips, official meetings, negotiations, unofficial meetings with representatives of political parties and NGOs. His job also included leadership of working groups and steering committees formed to provide for the Administration's PR actions, as well as preparation of analytical and reference materials for the President.

He defined the main task of the Presidential Administration - often referred to as "an alternative Cabinet" - as studying the situation, defining the tendency and developing policy guidelines, and has been consistent in seeking to strengthen the policy formulation arm, particularly in the field of policy analysis, forecasting and strategic planning. After Dmytro Tabachnyk resigned in December 1996, Volodymyr Lytvyn told the press that "the structure of the administration that has existed until now was formed, first of all, for particular people who had helped Kuchma to win the presidential election and, secondly, for the powers and opportunities provided by the Constitutional Agreement. With little adjustment, substituting the Constitutional Agreement with the Constitution, one may argue that the principle approach to forming the presidential staff remains unchanged. Meanwhile, after Tabachnyk's resignation and the arrival of Yevhen Kushnariov, the Presidential Administration itself lost much of its power and influence, and the remarkable public effect it had been given by Tabachnyk's skills and ambitions. Last year added little to activities of the Presidential Administration that could be regarded as a contribution to democracy-building in Ukraine. The internal rivalry within the Administration

surfaced in Yevhen Kushnariov's resignation and rapid decrease of Valery Pustovoitenko's "party of power", the People's Democratic Party, on the President. Simultaneously, the weight of business-financial-political circles increased.

For a rather long time, Volodymyr Lytvyn has been the President's official speechwriter and the author of the President's articles and public speeches. He was in charge of the President's press service and the group of advisers. Hence, in a way he provided for intellectual support of the top office. One of Mr. Lytvyn's men in the administration is Oleksandr Martynenko, former director of this country's major private news agency, Interfax-Ukraina, brought by Lytvyn to the position of the presidential spokesman.

In 1997, Volodymyr Lytvyn was one of the initiators of reconsidering the constitutional status of the President as the "head of the state". In his view, the President should be the "arbiter of the nation" and stand above the legislature, the executive and the judiciary branches. While recently he has made no comments on these issues, it is unclear whether his view has changed.

Remarkably for Ukraine's turbulent power circles, Mr. Lytvyn managed to make no serious conflicts with any of the state's key decision-making "clans". Furthermore, unlike Dmytro Tabachnyk in 1994-1996, viewed by the legislature and some of the media as vehemently anti-parliament and often described as a kind of the "evil genius" manipulating the decision-making process in this country, Volodymyr Lytvyn has been as smoothly low-profile and impersonal as a good apparatchik is supposed to be. He has never given a revealing interview, or been involved in a political or economic scandal, or been regarded as a significant political player. Most of his ambitions and possible actions in the new role remain unclear. According to informed sources, he has never been involved in any of the businesses linked to the top-ranking decision-makers of the executive branch.

Volodymyr Lytvyn does not belong to any political party or major influence group. He was among the few in the top level of the executive branch who did not take part in creating the pro-presidential - or rather, pro-Prime Minister Valery Pustovoitenko - "public association" Zlahoda, a government-organized "NGO" crafted to assist Leonid Kuchma's re-election. Meanwhile, he has highlighted the role of political parties and predicted a "rapid process" of party mergers after political parties become significant political players as a result of the introduction of a mixed election system. He has also been a strong advocate of adoption of the law "On Political Parties", arguing that the current legislation regulating activities of "public associations", political parties included, is inadequate and "vague".

In his new capacity, Volodymyr Lytvyn has obtained practically complete control over the President's personnel policy up to the level of regional governors, where most of the power is concentrated. He will also be in control of local self-governance bodies, which, in fact, perform the function of the central executive control over the regions, except, probably, elected chairpersons of local councils. In the situation when the Prime Minister is doomed to occupy a shaky position and deal almost exclusively with macroeconomic issues, the real power of the presidential chief of staff is very strong. Volodymyr Lytvyn is the full Doctor of History, the author of about 200 publications, including a political biography of Ukraine's first president Leonid Kravchuk, "Ukraine's Political Arena" (1994) and "Ukraine: Politics, Politicians, Power. The Background for a Political Portrait of Leonid Kravchuk" (1997).

Yet, some analysts believe that the position of the presidential chief of staff requires that its occupant expresses more clear views that might be identify as pro-Western or pro-Eurasian, pro-market or the opposite. Instead, Volodymyr Lytvyn appears to be a high-ranking career seeker with no definite perspective of his own who is unlikely to take radical steps but may be inclined to take quiet action and compromise if he feels his career depends on that.

According to some analysts, the appointment of Volodymyr Lytvyn to the position of the presidential chief of staff is the second in a row major "apparatus" victory of the President's adviser and architect of Leonid Kuchma's re-election Oleksandr Volkov, MP, who may take some 60% of the credit for winning the nation's top chair for Leonid Kuchma for the second time. While it is still not exactly clear what Mr. Volkov wants to get from the appointment of "his" chief of staff, this move, after arranging the appointment of Yevhen Marchuk to the position of the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, allowed Mr. Volkov, seen as the top Ukrainian lobbyist, to secure understanding and, possibly, cooperation of at least two principle centers of influence on the President. In any case, Oleksandr Volkov managed to avoid the possibility of having somebody else's protege placed in control over subnational power bodies.